

**Federal Railroad Administrator Joseph C. Szabo
National Association of Rail Passengers
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INTRODUCTION

Let me thank Jim Matthews, your new president, and also your chairman, Robert Stewart, for welcoming me today.

It is an honor to be here on behalf of President Obama and Secretary Foxx – and to be able to meet with NARP's representatives from around the country.

There is no greater advocacy group for train passengers in this country.

And within NARP, all of you rank among its greatest advocates of the mission to increase the quality and quantity of passenger rail service.

So, let me be clear: We want to do the same thing.

And that's what I'm here to talk about today.

I want to talk about the most fundamental thing we need to do to achieve this goal. We have to secure predictable, dedicated federal funding for passenger rail.

WHY TRAINS MATTER - ROADBLOCKS

Trains matter. Your *cause* matters.

Because of our national rail network, travel in our country is an experience available not just for some people, but for *all* people.

People who don't own cars, or who can't drive, or who live in remote areas without air and bus service. The long-distance network provides connectivity for rural America.

Trains are an alternative to congested highways and overcrowded airports.

The rail system is essential for our nation to safely, reliably, and efficiently move up to 100 million additional people and four billion tons of freight in the next 35 years.

And increasingly, at the local level, investing in passenger rail service and train stations is a pathway to large-scale neighborhood revitalization.

Often I'd go into more detail. But the fact is, all of you know *why* we need to invest in rail. You're well-versed in that.

You know about the costs of highway and air congestion.

You know Americans – particularly young people – are driving less, while riding Amtrak and public transportation more than ever before.

And you know about great train station projects: in places like Normal, Illinois; Brunswick, Maine; Seattle and Denver.

I've been out to Denver twice recently. And it's remarkable.

You stand outside that train station – where there used to be an industrial wasteland – and now see over five million square feet of commercial, residential, and office development sprouting up in its place.

It is a billion dollars in private-sector investment that was spurred by bringing a 19th century train station into the 21st century.

Some of you might've even seen the editorial in the Denver Post on the day the station opened, which summed it up perfectly by saying: *the past has become the future*.

And that's true. Rail is the mode of opportunity.

But, that future is one we still have to work deliberately to shape.

You see this with the on-time-performance challenges now plaguing Amtrak's network.

At FRA, the on-time performance manager follows performance of the network very closely. And I personally engage with the Chief Operating Officers of the host freight railroads over OTP performance.

That's part of the reason for record for on-time performance in 2012.

But the freight rail system performance is currently suffering greatly and Amtrak delays due to freight train interference are at a high, particularly on long-distance services.

And all those delays add up to missed connections, abandoned travel plans, and potentially long-term financial harm.

And it is all the more reason we need to have predictable, dedicated funding for rail improvement projects.

As much progress as we've made during this Administration in advancing and improving intercity passenger rail, in too many places, we still haven't been able to make the investments necessary to eliminate choke-points, ensure necessary capacity, and provide the public the reliable travel experience they deserve.

Nor has Amtrak had the predictability necessary to properly execute a strong capital improvement plan.

This Administration, in every single budget, has requested additional funding to continue enhancing American passenger rail.

But since Congress has not funded our passenger rail program since 2010, and barely funded Amtrak to allow for

survival, an enormous pipeline of improvement projects has backed up.

OUR VISION: GROW AMERICA

This spring, we sent Congress a solution to this problem.

It is called the GROW AMERICA Act and it is a four-year transportation bill that would increase funding for all forms of surface transportation.

It would increase transit and commuter rail funding by 70 percent.

And it would invest \$19 billion in rail safety and rail development.

The program fully funds Amtrak: ensuring a state of good repair, replacing obsolete equipment, and servicing legacy debt.

And this is system-wide: the Northeast Corridor, state corridors, and long distance services.

It would fully fund Positive Train Control on Amtrak routes.

And it would provide something which is very important: the resources to quickly and systematically bring all Amtrak stations into full compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act.

This is a fundamental Civil Right and must be achieved in a timely manner.

The Rail Service Improvement Program will continue driving the development of higher-performing rail service, with grants to build new corridors, improve existing services, and address those chokepoints delaying passenger, freight and commuter trains.

It would allow us to continue investing in building out a comprehensive passenger rail system, with three tiers of services based on the needs of each market:

- Core Express service with dedicated right-of-way and speeds of up to 250mph.
- Regional express service with speeds up to 125mph, like those routes now being developed in the Midwest.
- And important feeder routes, that serve those smaller markets.

The Rail Service Improvement Program will provide funding to support commuter railroads in installing Positive Train Control.

It will support rail-line relocation efforts; Shortline rail upgrades; grade crossing improvements; and projects that seal off corridors by strategically locating over-passes and underpasses – all efforts that improve safety, build capacity, improve reliability and reduce trip times.

And it will provide authority to establish Regional Rail Development Authorities, to better plan for and build regional visions for enhanced rail services in a well-coordinated manner.

This leads me to the most important part of Grow America, in that it does more than just increase funding.

GROW AMERICA reflects the Administration's commitment not just to some modes – as has historically been the case – but commits to *all* modes, by replacing the Highway Trust Fund with the *Transportation* Trust Fund.

For the first time ever, intercity passenger rail will have predictable, dedicated funding – just like all other transportation modes.

This would allow us to plan for and build-out a true multi-modal transportation system.

And a high-performing rail network will be an integral part of this well-balanced system.

CONCLUSION

But the fact is, we can't do *any* of this without Congressional action.

So this is where you come in.

When Jim came to FRA to meet with me recently, I heard about his plan to build up more support at the local, grassroots level.

And I believe this is critical.

What mayor, what citizen association, what chamber of commerce, would rather *not* have access to a proven formula for large-scale revitalization – one that provides an alternative to traffic congestion and build stronger regional connections?

And what if they knew there was a good plan – all Congress had to do was pass it – to make this a national priority?

What if they knew there was a good solution out there to address rail on-time performance issues, reduce train horn noise, make grade crossings safer, and help reduce backups?

This isn't a Democrat or a Republican issue. It's just common sense. And as the saying goes, "All politics are local."

So I challenge you: Think about who the movers and shakers are where you come from and reach out and educate them.

NARP has a long legacy of success.

You have a powerful voice in this debate on a national level. And you have nearly 30,000 members across the country who can carry this message.

You have an opportunity to change history, and shape a future that includes a well-balanced, multi-modal transportation network with a high-performing rail system.

So raise your voices. Make a difference. And focus on passing a bill with the provisions of GROW AMERICA.

Thanks, everyone. I look forward to your questions.